

State of Vermont Web Site Guidance

The Department of Information and Innovation maintain a set of policies and standards for state Web sites to ensure usability, accessibility, and consistency for all users. These standards and policies represent the minimally accepted requirements for state Web sites. However, we recognize that some design components can not be uniformly applied due to the diversity of requirements among state Web sites (i.e. content type, size, audiences, functionality and dynamic elements, and integration with services and other technical platforms).

This Web site guidance is intended to supplement the standards and provide additional guidance and direction on these areas of Web site development and design. This guidance is drawn from the previous version of the Look and Feel Standard as well as the default template for the Enterprise Content Management (ECMS) and is recommended by the state Web Taskforce.

Departments considering changes to their Web sites or considering new Web site development should contact the Director of Web Services at Harry.Bell@state.vt.us. Details of the process for state Web site development can be found online at dii.vermont.gov/Web_Portal/Web_Hosting. This process provides a road map for realizing departments' Web site objectives on time and without added costs. Project management guidance, tools, and resources are also available to support department staff during a Web site development project. Specific details of the process will vary depending on the scope of a given project but all Web projects will be based on this process.

Using the Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS)

The primary reason for the state Web Look and Feel Standard is to ensure that users can easily identify the Web site as an official State of Vermont government Web site. The ECMS is designed to support this standard and provides for similar functionality on all sites using the system.

A content management system, or CMS, is a Web based application that allows the creation and management of Web site content without requiring extensive knowledge of Web coding. The ECMS is a tool for State of Vermont Web site owners and developers to much more easily and quickly manage Web sites. For individuals or programs that own online content, the ECMS will allow non-technical staff of individual state government organizations to manage their own Web content on a remote server using only their current Web browser as a development tool.

Site Navigation

Sites built in the ECMS using the generic template will feature the left navigation area as the primary navigation. This template can also be used for a site design using top navigation as the primary navigation. In such cases the left navigation would then be used for second level navigation.

It is essential that users be able to access the first level of navigation no matter where they browse to on a given site. Because of this, the primary navigation in the ECMS was designed to function in such a way that it appears exactly the same on all pages contained within a site.

Top Navigation

The top navigation in the ECMS consists of a single row of links. This section is intended to be used either as the primary navigation for the site or as links to non-programmatic information such as “contact” pages, “about us” pages, and FAQs.

There is an option for sites that use top navigation as the primary navigation for the site to use a secondary top navigation bar. An example of this can be found here: <http://www.connectingcommuters.org/>

Right-hand Navigation

In the ECMS the right-hand navigation is the standard location for additional levels of navigation. If the left-hand navigation is the primary, right-hand navigation will be secondary. If top is primary and left is secondary then right-hand will be third level and lower.

An example can be found here:
http://dii.vermont.gov/DII_Divisions/Customer/Wireless_Web

Other designs are possible in the ECMS but this is the default method and will require the least amount of extra time and effort to get a new site ready for launch.

Bread Crumbs

Breadcrumbs appear horizontally across the top of all pages in the ECMS, below the top title bar and above the body content. They provide links back to the parent pages of the page currently being viewed. Breadcrumbs provide a trail for the user to follow back to the starting or entry point.

Graphic Design

A Website is one channel of communication with an audience and the design should be consistent with an organization's complete family of communication materials. The colors used within a Website should be a reflection of the color used to identify the state entity or program in all media. The State Brand Standards & Style Guide offers a range of color options that form a major part of the state brand identity and should be considered in the design of both printed materials and Websites.

Color should also be used consistently throughout the entire site (e.g. header, navigation, titles, body, fonts, and color) and general design should have consistent formatting and colors on all site pages to provide ease of navigation. Color should not be used as the only visual reference in navigating a Web site, for example, using color to show what section of a site you are in.

The CMO's **State of Vermont Brand Standards and Style Guide** is found here http://cmo.vermont.gov/documents/VT_StandardsGuide_2.0_2009_W2.pdf

Font

The fonts used by the ECMS generic template are Arial, Helvetica and Verdana. These fonts are thought to be most accessible to vision impaired users and are standard fonts on the most commonly used operating systems. Other fonts may be used for a site with a comprehensive graphical design where these standard fonts would detract from the overall effect. It is essential when choosing a different font that you select a standard font for each commonly used operating system. Failing to do this will result in your page using a default system font on any computer that does not have your selected font installed.

Fonts that occur within images on state Web sites should follow the same guidelines as html text. All text, whether included in an image or entered as characters, should be readable and accessible to those with vision impairment including color blindness.

Readability

Background colors can easily render a Web page unreadable by some members of the usership. Therefore, background colors should be carefully considered when creating the graphic design of a Web site. The person doing graphic design for a site should have the resources to assure this is addressed. Vermont Information Consortium (VIC), the state's contractor providing Web hosting, CMS, and application services, has staff able to help with this.

There are also resources available on the Web to help you select colors. These include:

The difference between the background color and the foreground color should be of high enough contrast. (<http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10-CSS-TECHS/#style-color-contrast>)

A tool for calculating contrast can be found here:
<http://juicystudio.com/services/colourcontrast.php#contrast>

A tool for seeing how images look to color blind users:
<http://www.vischeck.com/vischeck/vischeckImage.php>

Home Page Design

The home page of a site built in the ECMS should display all navigation without vertical scrolling. In some situations this may not be possible but every effort should be made to achieve this goal.

Logos

The ECMS allows for official agency, departmental, or program logos to be displayed in the left-hand navigation bar at the bottom. (This may mean that the logo isn't seen without scrolling on some pages.) Logos may not be displayed anywhere else in the navigation or banner of a site but may be used anywhere in the body of a page. Partner or sponsor logos should be displayed only in the body section.

There are certain logos that represent established state brands that can also be used in the footer of a Web site where appropriate.

These include

The 511 logo 

The 211 logo 

For assistance with branding your Web site with the logos and colors you wish to use please consult the state CMO's Office at cmo.vermont.gov.